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How to Winterize Your Home Now

- **Block the leaks.** Check the most common areas that leak, such as recessed lighting, window frames, doorframes, attic hatch, plumbing and electrical bypasses in the attic, and electrical outlets. Use weather-stripping, door sweeps, foam, and caulk to seal up the leaks.
- **Insulate.** You should have a minimum of 12 inches of insulation in your attic. If you don't know how to tell, look at your ceiling joists. If you can see them, you need more insulation. Also look into insulating your walls and floors above crawl spaces.
- **Check the furnace.** Turn the furnace on now to make sure it is working before the cold weather hits. It is a good idea to have the furnace cleaned and tuned annually. While this maintenance is being performed by heating technician, make sure of the following: the thermostat and pilot light are working properly; the fuel pipe entering your furnace doesn't have a leak; check the heating exchanger for cracks, as a crack can bring carbon monoxide into the home; and finally, make sure to change the filter in forced hot-air systems. The filter should be changed monthly during the heating season. Homeowners can change the furnace filter themselves.
- **Check the ducts on forced hot air system and baseboards on hot water systems.** Ducts aren't always easy to see, but you can often find them exposed in the attic, the basement, and in crawl spaces. Ducts should be vacuumed once every few years, to clean the abundant dust, animal hair, and other things that gather in that will impede the flow of hot air through the house. Clean hot-air registers, baseboard heaters, and radiators as needed; make sure furniture, carpeting and drapes do not block them.
- **Thermostat settings.** Reduce the thermostat setting when everyone is asleep or away from the home. Consider installing a programmable thermostat.
- **Don't forget the windows.** Storm windows are very helpful, especially if you have old, single-pane glass windows. Replacing windows can be very pricey and the experts say to do a few at a time. However, in the meantime, buy a kit you can get at your local hardware store. It is a special kind of plastic sheeting that is affixed to the window's interior with a hair dryer.

The heat from the hairdryer shrinks the sheeting to the window. It is pretty inexpensive, can be quite effective, and is easy to remove in the spring.

- **Remember the chimney.** Chimneys need to be swept, however, it does not need to be done every year. Just make sure it has been at least inspected before you start using it for the year. However, woodstove chimneys should be cleaned once a year. Buy a cap for your chimney to keep foreign objects out. Also to keep cold air out, fireplace/woodstove owners should keep the damper closed when it isn't in use. Fireplace owners should also keep the glass doors shut when it is not in use.
- **Reverse your fan.** By reversing the direction of the fan after summer, the fan will push warm air downward and force it to recirculate. To do this, when you look up at the fan, make sure it is turning clockwise.
- **Wrap the pipes.** Before the temperature hits freezing, make certain that the water to your hose is shut off inside your house and that the excess is drained. Next, go looking for pipes in the crawlspaces, basements, and garages that aren't insulated. Wrap them with pre-molded foam rubber sleeves or fiberglass insulation.
- **Clean your gutters.** In the fall, once the leaves have fallen, make sure to clean out the gutters on your house, as clogged gutters can cause water to back up and freeze, causing ice jams. Such ice jams will cause water to seep into your home. When washing out the gutters, also look for leaks and misaligned pipes.
- **Insulate your water heater.** Check the manufacturer's label before insulating your water heater. Use caution when insulating gas fired water heaters. Also, set the water heater temperature to about 120° Fahrenheit at most; higher temperature water can scald, and cooling it wastes not only the heat in the water; it also wastes the cold water needed to dilute the hot water.
- **Check the alarms.** Check the operation of all of your smoke detectors. Also, check to make sure your fire extinguisher is still where it should be and up to date. Finally, make sure to have a carbon monoxide detector. Every home should have at least one.